

## Sobriety/Traffic Safety Checkpoints

### What are sobriety/traffic safety checkpoints?

As defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “Sobriety checkpoints are traffic stops where law enforcement officers systematically select drivers to assess their level of alcohol impairment. The goal of these interventions is to deter alcohol-impaired driving by increasing drivers’ perceived risk of arrest. Selective breath testing checkpoints are the only type used in the United States.... Police must have a reason to suspect that drivers have been drinking before testing their blood alcohol levels.”<sup>1</sup>

### How do sobriety/traffic safety checkpoints reduce underage drinking and its consequences?

Sobriety checkpoints (also called roadside safety checks) are often used as part of comprehensive enforcement to deter alcohol-impaired driving. Combined with a vigorous awareness campaign, checkpoints tend to also decrease alcohol-related traffic crashes and fatalities among youth.

-----

<sup>1</sup>CDC. (N.D.). Research update: Sobriety checkpoints are effective in reducing alcohol-related crashes. From [http://www.cdc.gov/MotorVehicleSafety/Impaired\\_Driving/checkpoint.html](http://www.cdc.gov/MotorVehicleSafety/Impaired_Driving/checkpoint.html) (accessed December 12, 2011).

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that 19 percent of drivers aged 15 to 20 involved in 2009 fatal crashes were alcohol impaired (with blood alcohol content of 0.08 or more).

### How can my community take this action?

Take the following steps to initiate or strengthen sobriety checkpoints:

**Assess your State’s current law.** Find out if your State conducts sobriety checkpoints from the Governors Highway Safety Association® at [http://www.ghsa.org/html/stateinfo/laws/checkpoint\\_laws.html](http://www.ghsa.org/html/stateinfo/laws/checkpoint_laws.html). Because of constitutional issues and legal rulings, not all States conduct sobriety checkpoints. However, in some States where sobriety checkpoints are not legal or likely to occur, law enforcement can implement traffic safety checkpoints where testing for sobriety is only one aspect of a larger traffic safety check (e.g., checking that lights are working or children are in car seats). As of January 2011, 38 States, the District of Columbia, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Virgin Islands conduct sobriety checkpoints.

**Build community support and collect data.** Collect data about community-specific impaired driving rates, alcohol-related crashes, enforcement of impaired driving laws, and the types/numbers of consequences incurred when impaired driving laws are broken. This information can become your baseline data. When checkpoints are conducted, collect this information again to obtain outcome data.

**Raise public awareness.** Vigorous and widespread campaigns about impaired driving laws improve their effectiveness. To bring recognition to your efforts, consider choosing a theme for all sobriety/traffic safety checkpoint activities (e.g., “Sober or Slammer” [South Carolina], “Operation Zero Tolerance” [Georgia], or “Smart, Safe, and Sober” [Virginia]), including those done with the media.

**Measure and report successful outcomes.** Some objective measures of the effectiveness of sobriety checkpoints follow. Identifying rates by age group will help determine how such checkpoints contribute to reductions in underage drinking:

- ▶ Rates of alcohol-related nighttime crashes, injuries, and fatalities;
- ▶ Rates of motorists detained for failed sobriety testing;
- ▶ Rates of traffic stops and traffic safety checkpoints;
- ▶ Rates of arrests and convictions for driving under the influence;
- ▶ Number and types of arrests; and
- ▶ Changes in number of impaired driving arrests.

### Resources Supporting Action

CDC, Reducing alcohol-impaired driving: Sobriety checkpoints. *Guide to Community Preventive Services*, from <http://www.thecommunityguide.org/mvoi/AID/sobrietyckpts.html> (accessed January 31, 2012).

CDC, *The Health Communicator’s Social Media Toolkit*, from [http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/ToolsTemplates/SocialMediaToolkit\\_BM.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/ToolsTemplates/SocialMediaToolkit_BM.pdf) (accessed January 31, 2012).

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, *Low-Staffing Sobriety Checkpoints*, from [http://www.nhtsa.gov/people/injury/enforce/LowStaffing\\_Checkpoints/](http://www.nhtsa.gov/people/injury/enforce/LowStaffing_Checkpoints/) (accessed January 31, 2012).

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Focus on Prevention*, from <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA10-4120/SMA10-4120.pdf> (accessed January 31, 2012).